

PRELIMINARY STAFF SUMMARY OF INFORMATION



London Guarantee Building

360 N. Michigan Avenue

Submitted to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks July 1986
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CITY OF CHICAGO
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development
J.F. Boyle, Jr., Commissioner



COVER: The London Guarantee Building is one of Chicago's few and best examples of Beaux Arts-style classicism. *(Photo by Stephen A. Beal)*

ABOVE: Along with three other buildings constructed around the Michigan Avenue Bridge during the 1920s, the London Guarantee Building helps define one of Chicago's most dramatic and important urban spaces. *(Photo by Bob Thal)*

LONDON GUARANTEE BUILDING

360 N. Michigan Ave.

(1922-23; Alfred S. Alschuler, architect)

The LONDON GUARANTEE BUILDING is one of the city's few and best examples of Beaux Arts-style classicism applied to the design of a tall office building. It is one of four buildings constructed around the Michigan Avenue Bridge during the 1920s, which has helped define one of Chicago's most dramatic and important urban spaces.

The building was built by a British insurance company to be its American headquarters. The building's irregular-shaped site, between Michigan Avenue and Wacker Drive, was part of the land occupied by Fort Dearborn between 1803 and 1856.

Significant Features: The designation specifies "all the exterior faces of the structure."

Recommended to City Council: April 16, 1987

Ward: 42 (Alderman Natarus)

Ownership: It is owned by Investment Properties Assoc., represented by Helmsley-Spear Real Estate of Illinois. The owner does not consent to the designation.



The elaborate classical detailing of the building, as shown in the Corinthian columns, Roman lions, and Roman god Neptune in the arch above the entrance, demonstrate why it is one of Chicago's best examples of Beaux Arts-style architecture. (Photo by Bob Thall)

LONDON GUARANTEE AND ACCIDENT BUILDING
(also known as the Stone Container Building)
360 North Michigan Avenue

Architect: Alfred S. Alschuler

Date of Construction: 1922-1923

The London Guarantee and Accident Building, designed by Alfred S. Alschuler, is an excellent example of Beaux-Arts skyscraper design, dramatically sited on part of the original land used over a century before by the United States government for the location of Fort Dearborn. Fort Dearborn (the site of which was designated a Chicago Landmark on September 15, 1971), one of a series of log-built frontier outposts, was established in 1803, under the administration of President Thomas Jefferson and named for General Henry Dearborn, Secretary of War. The fort was destroyed in 1812 and rebuilt in 1816. The cornerstone ceremony for the London Guarantee and Accident Building was held on December 3, 1922, with officials of the Army, State, City, the London Guarantee and Accident Company, and the Chicago Historical Society in attendance. The ceremonies included a military escort of fifty-five men from Fort Sheridan, the same number of soldiers who evacuated Fort Dearborn in 1812 and were massacred at what is now Eighteenth Street and Calumet Avenue. To commemorate the site, Alschuler designed a bronze relief panel with imagery depicting Fort Dearborn, originally located over the central entrance doors of the building until a later remodeling of the entrance when it was removed and donated to the Chicago Historical Society. A small plaque identifying the site as the location of Fort Dearborn and the date it was established is affixed to the northeast corner of the building.

This magnificent urban space, where Michigan Avenue crosses the Chicago River, also became the focal point for the future development with the opening of the Michigan Avenue Bridge in 1920. During the next eight years the construction of the four buildings that surround the bridge - - the Wrigley Building, Tribune Tower, 333 North Michigan Avenue, and the London Guarantee and Accident Building - - led to the development of North Michigan Avenue into one of the city's major thoroughfares.

Development of North Michigan Avenue

The decade of the 1920s was a period of significant growth for the city of Chicago. The accomplishments of these years are demonstrably apparent today. Particularly laudable was the implementation of parts of Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett's 1909 *Plan of Chicago*, a widely influential document of city planning which visualized a number of monumental improvements throughout the city. The rapid growth of urban America during the nineteenth century had created cities that were crowded, congested, and frequently chaotic. Towards the end of the century, social concerns and aesthetic considerations prompted a movement to bring order to America's cities. In Chicago, the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 demonstrated how a handsomely ordered environment could be created on a large scale. The "White City," as the fair grounds were popularly called, provided impetus and support for urban planning in the United States, and the "City Beautiful" movement had begun. One of the major forces in this movement was Chicagoan Daniel Burnham, and in 1906 Burnham undertook to develop a plan for Chicago. Sweeping changes were advocated which included the transformation of the lake-front into a premier recreational area; the development of the city's parks into an expanded and unified park system; the creation of cultural and civic centers in the central area; the construction of a network of highways linking Chicago with the suburbs; and the consolidation of the city's rail terminals. The Plan treated Michigan Avenue as one of the major north-south axes, the one "destined to carry the heaviest movement of any street in the world."

The Chicago Plan called for widening Michigan Avenue between Randolph Street and Chicago Avenue and for raising it between Randolph and Grand Avenue to create a lower level that would accommodate commercial traffic. At the river, a double-decked bridge, the upper level for pedestrian and light vehicle traffic and the lower for heavy commercial traffic, was proposed to replace the outdated and overcrowded Rush Street Bridge which was then the primary river crossing. In 1909, the Chicago Plan Commission was established to promote the adoption and implementation of the Burnham Plan; one of its earliest projects was to persuade the city to undertake the improvement of Michigan Avenue. Work began on the street in 1916 and the construction of the bridge was started in 1918. It was opened with great fanfare on May 14, 1920 and, as historian Carl Condit relates in *Chicago 1910-29: Building, Planning and Urban Technology*:

The effect was immediate and striking, and in less than a decade the extension of Michigan Avenue northward to its termination at Oak Street was to be totally transformed into a new kind of urban boulevard.

Until then, the street north of the bridge had been called Pine Street from the river to Ohio Street and Lincoln Parkway from Ohio to Oak Street. With the opening of the bridge, the name was changed and Michigan Avenue became the continuous boulevard linking the North and South sides that had been envisioned in the Chicago Plan.

Beaux-Arts Classicism and Skyscraper Design

Few institutions have had as significant an effect on American architecture as did the Ecole des Beaux-Arts during the second half of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. The Paris school of architecture either provided or influenced the training of American architects for three generations beginning in the 1840s. Until this country's first architecture school was established in 1865, Americans seeking academic training in the field traveled to Paris to study at the Ecole. When the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Columbia University established the first two schools of architecture in the United States, both employed the teaching methods of the Ecole and imported instructors from that institution. As a result, Beaux-Arts principles persisted in American architecture into the 1920s.

In plan, Beaux-Arts buildings stressed formality and logic: spaces were arranged hierarchically along major and minor axes according to function. Beaux-Arts facades were generally monumental and borrowed liberally from historical, specifically classical, precedent. The goal was to produce structures of monumental grandeur, buildings that both delighted the eye and conveyed an image of rational order. These aims were to have a significant influence on early skyscraper design.

Once the technology of the tall skeleton-framed building had been developed toward the end of the nineteenth century, architects were faced with the problem of how to clad the skeleton frame. Two divergent approaches developed. A number of architects working in Chicago believed firmly that the new technology demanded new visual expression: they sought to express directly the geometry of the supporting frame in grid-like facades composed of simply treated piers and spandrels framing wide rectangular windows. For the most part they rejected the idea that historical ornament could be appropriately applied to the modern skyscraper. Other architects, loyal to their Beaux-Arts training, believed that historical forms made skyscrapers visually more interesting and appealing. They saw the unprecedented height of these buildings as an awkward problem demanding a Beaux-Arts solution. Using the classical column as a prototype, they divided skyscraper facades into three distinct zones corresponding to the column's base, shaft, and capital: the lower floors were elaborately treated to set them off from the uniformly treated floors of the tall middle zone which in turn was capped by a distinctively treated top that forcefully terminated the building. Everything in the design was calculated to be visually pleasing to the passerby.

Design of the London Guarantee and Accident Building

A unique feature of the London Guarantee and Accident Building is the design adaptation of the building to the irregular site, giving it a somewhat trapezoidal shape. The east facade follows the regular north-south axis of Michigan Avenue while the west facade follows the southwesterly orientation of what was South Water Street when the structure was built and which shortly became the double-decked Wacker Drive. Joining these two

is the building's principal facade, a slightly concave wall facing the river. The plan was made even more irregular by the refusal of one property owner to sell his small Michigan Avenue parcel to the building corporation. Alschuler designed the building around this parcel, introducing a light court on the Michigan Avenue side of the building. When the building corporation was later able to obtain a 198-year lease to that small property, Alschuler designed a five-story section that makes continuous the lower portion of the Michigan Avenue facade and retains the courtyard effect above.

The Beaux-Arts influence is very strong in this twenty-one story building. Both the top and bottom are treated monumentally, while the intermediate floors are uniformly treated as a straightforward office tower. Rusticated masonry on the lower five stories sets off the base. A grand entranceway, framed by four engaged fluted Corinthian columns and a classical entablature, rises through the lower four stories. A colonnade of smooth surfaced Corinthian columns marks the top three floors. A balustrade surmounts the building, above which rises a cupola in the form of a ringed colonnade with a domed top. The elaborate treatment of the top served as a counterpoint to the Wrigley Building tower across the river.

The main entrance to the building, beginning with the vestibule, faces Wacker Drive as illustrated in the shaded areas of the enclosed first floor plan. The design for the vestibule floor consists of geometric shapes culminating in a large double star in the center of the room. Each shape is cut from large pieces of white, brown, and black marble. The walls are faced with travertine marble from floor to ceiling. Completing the vestibule is an elaborately detailed plaster vaulted ceiling, surmounted by a central dome. In 1946, the building was sold to the Michigan Wacker Building Corporation, and the new owners considered filling in the Michigan Avenue light court to increase the amount of rentable space. Neither this proposal, nor a similar plan proposed in 1952, were undertaken. In 1957, alterations were made to the entrance and the vestibule. A dropped ceiling, covering the original vault and dome, and contemporary light fixtures were added to the vestibule. Above the entrance, between the two center columns, the glass elements were replaced with large pieces of stone. The building's name, carved into the stone entablature above the columns, was covered over with cement and the decorative stone eagle directly above the name was removed. Despite the alterations, the original structure is almost entirely intact and could be restored.

The Architect

Alfred S. Alschuler was born in Mattoon, Illinois in 1876. He completed his bachelor's and master's degrees at the Armour Institute of Technology, later to become the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT), and studied at the School of the Art Institute before joining Dankmar Adler's architectural practice in 1900. He continued with Adler until 1903. Samuel Atwater Treat joined Alschuler in a partnership which lasted until 1907 when Alschuler began independent practice. Although Alschuler specialized in commercial and industrial architecture, he designed a wide range of structures including public buildings,

automobile showrooms, synagogues, and apartment buildings. He was a prolific architect during a time when the city was developing a large manufacturing base, as shown by examining his original commission book which lists over 1800 job orders between the years 1908 and 1939. (See Appendix A for a listing of structures designed by Alschuler that demonstrate this wide variety of work and were still in existence as of 1981.) Alschuler became well-known as the architect who designed many buildings in the Central Manufacturing District in 1913. This district is bounded by Thirty-fifth, Thirty-ninth and Morgan streets, and Ashland Avenue. During the previous five years Alschuler had designed about thirty commercial buildings. At a time when the city was developing an industrial fringe of unattractive functional buildings, Alschuler's harmonious and refined designs and restrained classical detailing were changing the texture of the city. The London Guarantee and Accident Building was Alschuler's most important commission. It was awarded the 1923 Gold Medal for excellence in design by the Lake Shore Trust and Savings Bank which originated and conducted the Gold Medal Contest. The jury was composed of Charles E. Fox, president of the Illinois Society of Architects; Pierre Blouke, president of the Chicago Architectural Club; and Alfred Granger, president of the Chicago Chapter, American Institute of Architects. The jury stated that:

In making the award for the London Guarantee and Accident Building the jury has considered not only the architectural value of the building, but also its importance in the development of the City of Chicago and the amount of architectural knowledge shown in the making of the plans and elevations.

A plaque acknowledging this honor is affixed to the northeast corner of the building. Alschuler was a trustee of IIT and influential in organizing the effort to persuade Ludwig Mies van der Rohe to become head of IIT's Department of Architecture in 1938. Alschuler was a member of the American Institute of Architects for over twenty years and at one time served on the Illinois State Board of Architectural Examiners. He died on November 4, 1940 at the age of sixty-four.

The London Guarantee and Accident Company and the Stone Container Corporation

The building at 360 North Michigan Avenue has long been known by the names of the two companies that were its primary tenants for over sixty years. The first was the company which constructed the building. London Guarantee and Accident Company of New York, the oldest surviving domestic credit insurance company, was organized in England in 1869, pioneering in accident, fidelity, and commercial credit insurance. The company began specializing in credit insurance from its United States branch in Chicago around the turn of the century. In 1922, London Guarantee was acquired by the Phoenix Assurance Company Ltd., the first British company to establish an agency in the United States back in 1804, in New York City. Phoenix became affiliated with the Continental Insurance Companies on January 1, 1968 under an agreement through which Continental would manage the affairs of the British company in the United States. The agreement

called for an exchange of reinsurance of three domestic subsidiaries of the Phoenix which included London Guarantee and Accident Company of New York. In 1985, Continental sold its interest in London Guarantee to a British firm.

In 1960, Stone Container Corporation acquired a long term lease on the building. Stone Container, founded in 1926 as a manufacturer of paper and twine, is a major manufacturer of corrugated containers, packaging materials, and forest products. The building at 360 North Michigan became known as the Stone Container Building. In 1986, the company moved to 150 North Michigan Avenue, and today the building is known simply by its address, 360 North Michigan Avenue.

The London Guarantee and Accident Building is a unique Beaux-Arts design with an imaginative siting plan by one of Chicago's most prolific and underrated architects, Alfred S. Alschuler contributed to the architectural development and expanding industrial base of the city of Chicago by his expertise and knowledge of the architectural requirements of the industrial and commercial community. In concert with the three other 1920s buildings facing the Michigan Avenue Bridge, the London Guarantee and Accident Building defines one of Chicago's finest urban spaces and one of the most spectacular vistas in this country. For over four decades the London Guarantee and Accident Building has contributed to the development of North Michigan Avenue and to the economic vitality of Wacker Drive and the city of Chicago.

APPENDIX A

EXTANT BUILDINGS BY ALFRED S. ALSCHULER

This list includes the date of the design and the original name of the building.

- | | |
|---------|---|
| 1910 | Peroline Floor Clean Company, northwest corner, 37th and Jasper Place |
| 1911 | Rogers and Hall Printing Company, 124 West Polk (top two floors, 1914) |
| 1912 | John R. Thompson Commissary Building, 350 North Clark
The Shops Building, 17-25 North Wabash |
| 1913 | Webster Building, 327 South LaSalle (top five stories, 1929)
Donohue Annex, 723-33 South Dearborn |
| 1915 | Hump Hair Pin Company, northwest corner, Prairie and Cullerton |
| 1916 | Pelouze Building, 218-30 East Ohio
John Sexton Building, 500 North Orleans (eastern portion, 1919) |
| 1918 | Legler Branch, Chicago Public Library, southeast corner, Pulaski and Monroe
(proposed for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, June 1986) |
| 1919 | Ilg Electrical Ventilating Company, 2800-58 West Roosevelt Road |
| 1920-22 | Hudson and Marmon Automobile Showrooms, 2230-38 South Michigan |
| 1921 | London Guarantee and Accident Building, 360 North Michigan
(proposed as a Chicago Landmark 1986)
Cuneo Press Building, southwest corner, Grove and Cermak |
| 1922 | Griswold-Walker Warehouses, 1525 South Newberry
Blum Building, 624-30 South Michigan
(proposed as a Chicago Landmark as part of the Michigan Avenue-Grant Park District, September, 1984) |
| 1923 | K.A.M. Isaiah Israel Temple, 1100 East Hyde Park Boulevard
(designated a Chicago Landmark, June 9, 1977)
Columbian Colortype Company, 320-36 East 21st
Hartman Furniture Company, northwest corner, Wabash and Adams |
| 1924 | Michigan-Ohio Building, northwest corner, Michigan and Ohio |
| 1925 | Commercial store, southwest corner, Grand and State |
| 1926 | Adams-Franklin Building, northeast corner Adams and Franklin
Michigan-Lake Building, southwest corner, Michigan and Lake
1215 North Astor Cooperative Apartments |
| 1927 | Chicago Mercantile Exchange, northwest corner, Franklin and Washington
Finchley Building, 23 East Jackson |
| 1929 | Harrison Hotel and Electric Garage, southeast corner, Wabash and Harrison |

Compiled by C. W. Westfall, February 12, 1981

COMMISSION ON CHICAGO HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL LANDMARKS
320 North Clark Street, Room 516, Chicago, Illinois 60610
(312)744-3200

June 27, 1986

STAFF ANALYSIS OF LANDMARK CRITERIA AS APPLIED TO THE LONDON GUARANTEE
AND ACCIDENT BUILDING

The staff recommends that the following portions of the building be included under the landmark designation of the London Guarantee and Accident Building:

Exterior - the Michigan Avenue and the Wacker Drive facades.

Interior - the vestibule on the first floor of the building.

The London Guarantee and Accident Building meets the following criteria as established by the Municipal Code of the City of Chicago.

1. Its character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

The London Guarantee and Accident Building has character, interest, and value as one of the first buildings to be erected around the new Michigan Avenue Bridge. As such, it helps to form the gateway to North Michigan Avenue and historically has figured in the development of that street as one of Chicago's premier thoroughfares.

2. Its location as a site of a significant historic event.

The London Guarantee and Accident Building was constructed on part of the original portion of the land used over a century before by the United States government for the location of Fort Dearborn. Fort Dearborn, one of the log-built frontier outposts was established in 1803, under the administration of President Thomas Jefferson and named for General Henry Dearborn, Secretary of War.

6. Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen.

The Beaux-Arts influence is very strong in this twenty-one story building. Both the top and bottom are treated monumentally, while the intermediate floors are uniformly treated as a straightforward office tower. Rusticated masonry on the lower five stories sets off the base. A grand entranceway, framed by four engaged fluted Corinthian columns and a classical entablature, rises through the lower four stories. A colonnade of smooth-surfaced Corinthian columns marks the top three floors. A balustrade surmounts the building, above which rises a cupola in the form of a ringed colonnade with a domed top. The elaborate treatment of the top served as a counterpoint to the Wrigley Building tower across the river.

The London Guarantee and Accident Building

June 27, 1986

Page 2

7. Its identification as the work of an architect or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of the City of Chicago.

Alfred S. Alschuler specialized in commercial and industrial architecture, and also designed a wide range of structures including public buildings, automobile showrooms, synagogues, and apartment buildings. Alschuler was a prolific architect according to his original commission book which lists over 1800 job orders between the years 1908 and 1939. Alschuler became well known as an architect of industrial buildings, in particular many of the buildings in the Central Manufacturing District.

9. Its relationship to other distinctive areas which are eligible for preservation according to a plan based on an historic, cultural, or architectural motif.

The London Guarantee and Accident Building is located on the Site of Fort Dearborn, designated a Chicago Landmark on September 15, 1971. The Wrigley Building, the Tribune Tower, 333 North Michigan Avenue, and the Michigan Avenue Bridge are under consideration by the Landmarks Commission for landmark designation. The location of the London Guarantee and Accident Building and its relationship to these three buildings and bridge define one of Chicago's finest urban spaces.

10. Its unique location or singular physical characteristic representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Chicago.

In concert with the three other 1920s buildings, the London Guarantee and Accident Building, facing the Michigan Avenue Bridge, is oriented toward the broad expanse of river and lake on the one side and on the other the river angles southwest providing a panorama of the buildings along the riverfront. Few urban vistas in this country are as spectacular or incorporate such monuments of 1920s skyscraper design. For over four decades the London Guarantee and Accident Building has represented an established and familiar visual feature of the City of Chicago.



The London Guarantee Building was one of the first buildings to be built around the new Michigan Avenue Bridge as shown in this 1920s photo.

COMMISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS

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The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. It is responsible for recommending to the City Council that individual buildings, sites, objects, or entire districts be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law. The Commission is staffed by the Chicago Department of Planning and Development, whose offices are located at 320 N. Clark St., Room 516, Chicago, IL 60610; Ph: 312-744-3200; TDD Ph: 744-2958.